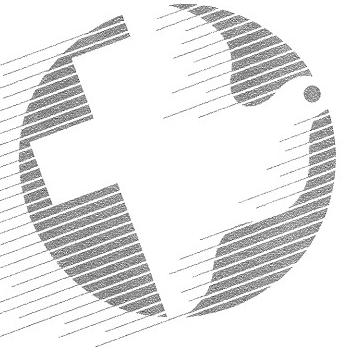


- Report No. 117
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Women's Concerns

Report



Abortion: Can we offer an alternative?



I have long been concerned that Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, with our teaching on peace, discipleship and community, should speak and act more clearly on the issue of abortion. Surely, on this difficult issue, our Anabaptist tradition can offer an alternative to the polarized positions of the dominant culture.

In October 1990 I reported in *Voice* the results of an informal survey I made of 45 Mennonite Church-related institutions and agencies. I wanted to know whether we practice what we teach about "family values." In answer to the question, "How do you respond to unmarried pregnant employees," most answered "not an option," "termination," "dismissal," or "never happened." (Some replied with compassion and concern for the mother and child.)

The replies to the survey revealed attitudes that need to change. How can we coerce by legislation a "right to life" that we do not support and cannot enforce among our own members? How can we expect individuals to take risks when we won't support them?

We must admit that our communities have not been "safe places" for unmarried pregnant women, for single mothers, for poor people, for the disabled. If we are to be credible to the wider society, our lives as well as our words must declare an alternative to violence and coercion.

Can we change? Can we build communities that truly value life? That put people above consumer goods and middle class respectability? That are known more for our compassion than our material success?

Taking on this assignment was a case of saying "someone should do it," and then realizing no one else was stepping forward. My goal has been to open up the debate, to bring the abortion issue home to Mennonites through the voices of Mennonite women with a broad range of views and experiences. I see this as a necessary first step if our communities are to become agents for reconciliation, healing and redemption.

Sixteen women agreed to share their stories—four health care workers, two lawyers, three activists, four women who have faced the decision to have an abortion, and three church leaders from India. I am grateful to each of these women. Listen to them.

Eve MacMaster, compiler of this issue, is editor of *Voice*, the monthly publication of the Women's Missionary and Service Commission of the Mennonite Church. She lives in Bluffton, Ohio.

by Barbara Ellen Beiler

Health care worker: **"I listen to a lot of broken people"**

As a certified nurse-midwife, I cannot deny the reality of abortion, nor can I avoid dealing with the issue. In seeking God's answer, I was directed to Revelation 3:20, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him [her], and he [she] with me." Jesus invites himself into my presence but never forces himself. I can maintain my belief system while I work with those of different beliefs. This is not easy.

I became a nurse-midwife two years out of nursing school. After I made the commitment to a foreign mission assignment, I learned I had to take a nurse-midwifery course. As a primary care provider for women and babies, I experienced vicariously the pain of unwanted pregnancies. I tried to reach a few women before they became pregnant.

When I counsel, I first explain the reproductive cycle and methods of contraception. I stress that abstinence is the best choice for those not committed to a lifetime partner. I encourage teenagers to talk with their parents. I tell them commitment should come before sex. I encourage singles who are sexually active to consider what pregnancy could do to their relationship. The commandments of the Bible were put there for our protection and happiness.

I stress the perils of multiple sexual partners and sexually transmitted disease. Many people participate in risky behavior, believing they will escape consequences.

When I counsel pregnant women, I want them to have healthy pregnancies and positive birth experiences. I want them to have positive first days with their newborns. I encourage breast feeding for the health of the mother and baby and to promote the beginning of a life-long bond.

I encourage those dealing with adoption to work with a counselor trained in helping them through the pregnancy, birth and separation experience. I encourage them to be honest in making the adoption choice.

I encourage those contemplating abortion to talk with their families, friends and pastors, and to think seriously before making a final decision. I tell them that this pregnancy will always stay with you; at whatever point you lose this child, there will be grief. I say, please, do not make abortion a means of contraception, but rather make better choices so you won't face this dilemma again.

I encourage parents to talk with their teenagers, to help them make good choices, to be the protectors they are meant to be, and to hold their children responsible for their choices.

The legal system has made it the responsibility of health care providers to offer genetic testing. I tell those who would decide to have an abortion on the basis of genetic testing what they need to do. I tell them that genetic testing is not 100 percent accurate, that amniocentesis can cause the loss of a healthy baby. I tell them that tests cannot detect all defects; no one can guarantee a healthy baby. I encourage them to believe that God will help them raise this child, whether or not it is "normal." Genetic testing brings another dilemma—parents can make choices based on the sex of the baby. Our technology tempts us to make decisions God never intended.

As I listen to a lot of broken people tell stories of misery and heartache, I am amazed that the consequences of sin are so clearly defined in the Bible. Much of our suffering is the consequence of wrong choices. God is willing to forgive and to heal the past. Not only does Jesus Christ forgive and make us whole—his power will give the strength necessary to continue to make good choices.

Barbara Ella Beiler, San Antonio, Tex., is a certified nurse-midwife.

"After meeting people who have had to make these decisions, I find it difficult to judge. Women facing medically-complicated pregnancies need caring, non-judgmental support for the decision-making process and its aftermath."

by Bonnie Bergey

Health care worker: "I find it difficult to judge"

As a medical secretary for nine years in an OB-GYN office, I became aware of the painful decisions that women face. Since the practice I worked for did not generally do abortions, my experience was with women who had to decide about medically-indicated (therapeutic) abortion.

The present political climate in this country has made it difficult for women to make a decision for abortion. According to a 1988 Gallup poll, 60 percent of those polled approved of an abortion if the baby was seriously deformed. Of the evangelicals represented in this poll, 53 percent approved, while 33 percent disapproved. For Christian women, those 33 percent can wield a powerful, disturbing influence.

I witnessed three devout Christian women with anencephalic pregnancies. In an anencephalic pregnancy, an open neural tube defect occurs during the first month. The tube, a precursor of the backbone, spinal cord and brain, must close in the first month, or the unborn baby will not develop a normal brain. Although the baby may live a few hours after

birth, the condition is always fatal. Complications often occur for the mother; Caesarean sections are usually necessary. The problem is usually not detected until the second trimester. It may show up at about the sixteenth week, with further testing necessary.

Of these three women, a pastor's wife reached her decision to have an abortion with regret but with her husband's support. She had three other children and a history of serious medical problems.

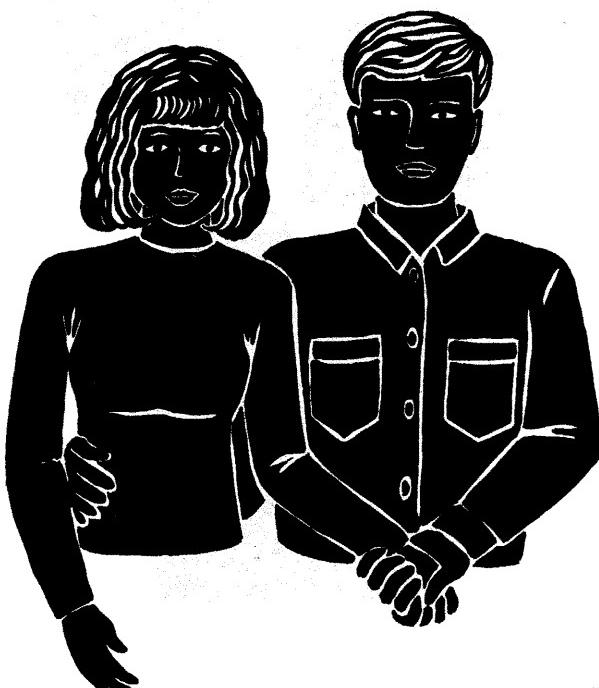
A second woman, in her first pregnancy, refused to believe the ultrasound. It hurt to watch her sit in the waiting room month after month with the other expectant mothers. We never knew if she was pressured or simply hoping against hope that the technology was wrong. The baby was stillborn.

The third situation involved a young couple with two small children. When faced with an anencephalic pregnancy, they agreed to terminate it. But their pastor took a strong stand against the termination, and the husband was convinced that abortion would be wrong in God's sight. The wife saw the futility of continuing the pregnancy, torturing herself with prenatal visits with no chance of a living baby. The situation put a terrible strain on their marriage. Finally they made the decision to terminate the pregnancy. We were relieved when the marriage was not terminated, although church affiliation was.

Another of our patients had two severely handicapped children under the age of five; neither child was ambulatory. She and her husband had a modest income and medical expenses of \$25,000 a year. When she found herself pregnant again, prenatal testing showed another child with severe abnormalities. Originally opposed to abortion, this mother chose to terminate the pregnancy.

After meeting people who have had to make these decisions, I find it difficult to judge. Women facing medically-complicated pregnancies need caring, non-judgmental support for the decision-making process and its aftermath. Pastors and counselors need to get the facts from the physicians directly involved. The church can provide an environment of support, in small group settings or Sunday school classes. I believe that God's grace will be given to those who make difficult choices in the midst of moral ambiguity and tragic circumstances.

Bonnie Bergey, a retired medical secretary, writes, volunteers at her local library, and teaches adult Sunday School at Souderton (Pa.) Mennonite Church.



"Let us do what we can to make it unnecessary for health care professionals to say, 'Abortion is a service that is needed.' "

by Anne Krabill Hershberger

Health care worker: **"Let us do what we can to make it unnecessary"**

At a conference I recently attended, two physicians told why they do or do not conduct abortions. My mind froze when one said early in the session, "This is a service that is being asked for and demanded by women. I have the knowledge and ability to do them safely under sterile conditions, so I enjoy doing them and providing this service." The rest of the discussion was positive toward abortion.

In my work in maternity nursing, bioethics and human sexuality education, I have not heard anyone say abortion is a good solution to the problem of an unwanted pregnancy. Rather than debate the legitimacy of abortion for Christians, the nature of fetal tissue, or when humans are persons with rights, I prefer to focus on how we can be helpful.

First, I agree with experts who say most of us can agree that: too many abortions are being done; death of the fetus is certain; abortion for convenience is morally wrong; abortion is a tragic experience to be avoided; a consistent ethic of life should be taken seriously (war, capital punishment, euthanasia); shouting sessions are not helpful; preventing problem pregnancies and supporting persons with problem pregnancies is preferable.

Second, when another human being is struggling with a difficult decision, it is our opportunity to stand by, listen, ask the important questions, put the person in touch with others who can help, and try to reconcile those who cannot communicate. I do not include "give advice" or "make the decision" in this list.

Third, we can be supportive, caring and approachable, withstand the struggling person's expressions of anger, hate, guilt and self-disgust. We can be there for her regardless of her decision.

I think about a young Mennonite woman from a family of church leaders. Some years after an abortion she told her sad

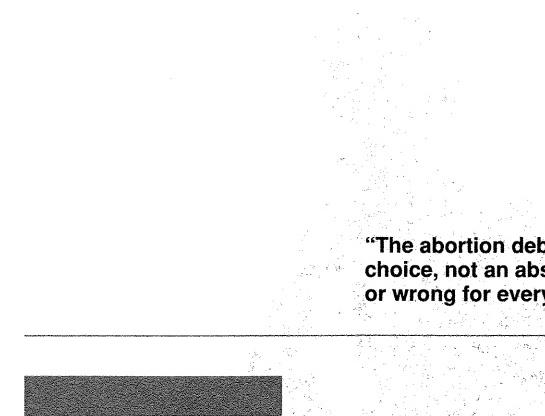
story to me, a stranger. When she became pregnant out of wedlock, she felt she had no choice. She had been taught that premarital sex is wrong, and she could not bring herself to tell her family, even though she was sure they would continue loving her. She could not face their disappointment and embarrassment. She did not feel comfortable with anyone in her circle of Christian friends. She was alone as she sought an abortion.

Instead of marching in the streets, I work at preventing the need for such a decision. I applaud those who help to build esteem in children so they do not look for love through premature sexual intercourse. I support those who provide activities for youth. I encourage those who love, support and/or make a home for babies who might have been aborted. I acknowledge the courage of women who felt they had no option as they seek forgiveness and wholeness.

Let us do what we can to make it unnecessary for health care professionals to say, "Abortion is a service that is needed."

Anne Krabill Hershberger, RN, MSN, is an associate professor of nursing at Goshen (Ind.) College, the wife of Abner Hershberger, and mother of two adult daughters. She is a member of College Mennonite Church.





"The abortion debate is about choice, not an absolute right or wrong for everyone."

by Karen Wiens Roth

Health care worker: "They were set up"

Can Mennonites reconcile abortion with pacifist beliefs? Can we resolve the tension between our belief in the sacredness of human life and individual responsibility, allegiance to God, and accepting people who are different?

My psychotherapy clients do not speak of right or wrong. They were set up by childhood abuse and neglect to act out sexually. They want to be in control of their minds, bodies and souls. They want to choose their future. Here are stories of real women who did what they thought they had to do. (All names are fictional.)

Sarah had been sexually promiscuous and used drugs and alcohol excessively. She was in college when she got pregnant. Her boyfriend took no responsibility, and she had an abortion. Sarah is a survivor of incest by her alcoholic father, her stepmother and an uncle. Her father began molesting her after her mother died; she was four years old. She says, "I feel worse about the promiscuity than about the abortion. The only thing my parents taught me to do well was to have sex." An unhappily married wife of an emotionally abusive husband, she is still using sex to feel needed and to stop harassment. "It works; it always did," she says.

Childhood sexual abuse and incest impede the development of self-esteem, spirituality, healthy sexuality, opportunities for learning and mature relationships. Incest survivors learn that their worth depends on meeting other's needs. They are set up for violation of their minds, bodies and souls. Incapable of mature decision-making, they choose abortion to have control and to avoid punishment.

Hunger love (developmental nurturance needs not met) also sets women up to act out sexually. **Jane**, a college student, was not respected or nurtured at home by her physician father (who grew up Mennonite) or mother, whose main concern was meeting her own needs. She stayed in a

relationship that was not satisfying and got pregnant. She had an abortion because the pregnancy was the wrong time, wrong place and wrong man.

Like many others, **Mary** was set up to abort a pregnancy because of male domination. She was 17 and dating an illegal immigrant when she got pregnant. Her attorney father arranged for an abortion because of his disapproval and humiliation. She was not given a choice.

Barbara was married but separated when she became pregnant by a man she loved. He disappeared when he learned of her pregnancy. In desperation, she called her husband, who promised to take her back but without the baby. She aborted in order to save the marriage, which was physically, sexually and mentally abusive. No longer married, she grieves for her unborn potential baby.

For many Mennonites the sacredness of human life is an absolute. Those who choose abortion are choosing moral principles that, for them, are of equal value. It is not an issue of right or wrong, but of choice. Who will decide? How will the decision be made? What are the circumstances?

As Mennonites, our allegiance is to God, not the state. When the state legislates morality, we lose control over our lives. The abortion debate is about choice, not an absolute right or wrong for everyone.

Karen Wiens Roth, a psychotherapist in private practice, works with survivors of incest, sexual abuse and other traumas. She lives with her family in Palmer Lake, Col., and attends Mountain Community Mennonite Church.

"I do not believe that a woman has so much control over her body that she can determine whether or not she wants to bring the baby into the world."

by Sharon Irvin

A lawyer's struggle: **"Are we to pick and choose?"**

I grew up in the 1950s in one of the many middle class African-American homes where girls were told, "Keep your dress down and your panties up." It was our responsibility to avoid pregnancy. Abortion was a taboo subject. Besides, abortion was dangerous. Oh, every now and then you would hear whispers that someone had done the unforgivable, but those were few and far between.

It was the unspoken law of our community that if you were big enough to get pregnant, then you were big enough to take the consequences of your actions—you and the young man got married or you became responsible for providing for the baby's necessities yourself. I knew plenty of girls who got pregnant without the benefit of a marriage license. It was their duty to care for those children to the best of their abilities and without looking to welfare to do it! And they did it, raising children that they and their community could be proud of. I do not mean to imply that all those pregnancies worked out for the best, or that all the children were saints, but for the most part it was not as horrible as destroying a life that never should have been started in the first place.

Of course there were several girls who suddenly had strange illnesses that kept them out of school for the rest of the year. We knew that the babies had either been given up for adoption or family members in other cities had taken them. Abortion was never an alternative.

At that time my only formulated idea on abortion was that it was a sin akin to murder, a view that I would have been hard pressed to substantiate from a biblical perspective. Most people I knew considered themselves Christians and, on the surface at least, were anti-abortion. Over the years, as I have studied the Bible, I have searched for a justification for abortion. With a belief in the Bible as truly the word of God, I read scriptures like Psalm 125:3–5 and 139:13–16, Jeremiah 1:5, and Isaiah 49:5, and I cannot believe that God meant for us to abort a child.

How could a man be punished for accidentally hurting a pregnant woman so that she aborts (Exodus 21:22) and abortion be right? If a pregnant woman, through no fault of her own, is involved in an accident that results in the death of the fetus, the person causing the accident can be charged



with manslaughter. It is ludicrous that in one instance a baby is a person for whom one becomes liable and in another instance it becomes a nonentity that can be destroyed at the mother's whim. I do not believe that a woman has so much control over her body that she can determine whether or not she wants to bring the baby into the world.

Some people say that abortion is the best choice when there is a possibility of a birth defect. But defects can occur at any point in a person's life. That is like saying that whenever a defect is detected we should consider getting rid of that person. Jesus said in John 16:33 that in the world we will have tribulations. Are we to pick and choose what things we will bear as if the Lord does not know what he is doing? Or are we going to let our character be built and prove our faithfulness in the midst of stressful conditions?

With all the commotion over one's individual rights, no one seems concerned about the unborn child having the right to be born. A woman's concerns about the rights over her body should preclude the right to abort any time she wishes but should include protection of the unborn child developing in her womb.

Sharon Irvin, lawyer and teacher, is Mennonite Church representative to the MCC U.S. Women's Concerns Committee. She lives in Los Angeles.

"It is wrong to call the planned procedure 'murder' when we know that the identical procedure, unplanned, was not death."

by Ruth Stoltzfus Jost

A lawyer's struggle: "My views changed"

Some aspects of God, I have learned, are not available to us through belief, but only through the crucible of experience. In ordinary life as well, wisdom from experience can't be obtained any other way. This kind of lived truth has led me to conclusions I did not anticipate with respect to abortion and its debate.

I was a Christian feminist in the early 70's who was also single and celibate. It seemed to me self-evident that up until the time a woman gave birth the decision to proceed with or terminate pregnancy was solely hers to make. It is her body making a baby, I remember arguing with a friend. There is no separate person until she decides to go forward with the pregnancy and give birth. Everything in my experience gave this contention a logic that to me was clear.

Some time later I married a wonderful man and we had a child. I was transformed by the experience. Even while I was staggering from the shock of birth, a colicky baby, sore nipples and lack of sleep, a powerful connection with our baby was formed that left me changed and deepened. In the midst of this, and despite the fact that I had no intention of revisiting the issue, my views on abortion changed. The logic which found a second person only at birth was no longer adequate. I had been carrying a second person whom I prized like my life.

But the story doesn't end here. When I was eight weeks into a third pregnancy, my doctor showed me a sonogram picture with no beating heart, no growth. This is a "blighted ovum," he explained gently. I called my husband with the disappointing news. "We'll try again," he said, and I hung up the phone and scheduled the D&E recommended for dealing with the certain miscarriage. I told my doctor before he wheeled me in, "Well, I guess it was a false start, but we'll try again." (We did, with success.)

Those spontaneous comments by seasoned parents of two treasured children, changed to the core by the powerful love called up in us, veterans of many hours of singing, rocking,

holding and loving our babies, now longing for one more child — these responses make clear to me the nature of what we had experienced. We had lost a pregnancy, but, God be thanked, not a baby.

Every parent considers that possibility. We have walked the "millionaire's walk" at night to luxuriate in the beauty of our sleeping children. I have stood in their rooms during the day when the house is quiet and looked at their scattered clothes and toys, the string, sticks and other debris of their inventive concoctions, stopped almost mid-air in their absence. In such moments I have begun to miss them already and thought that if I were ever to stand in one of their rooms like this after a child's death, I would never recover. The possibility that I misunderstood my own experience with miscarriage, that I have somehow blinked my eyes and without knowing it lost a child is beyond credibility.

"We'll try again" and "It was a false start" are unthinkable reactions to the death of a child. I do not know when one enters into the stage of carrying not the makings of life, but a child. I only know that at eight or nine weeks I was not at that stage, and I will always be thankful.

Why do I relate these experiences of birth and early miscarriage, neither of which is conclusive on the question of exactly when a separate person exists? Because abortion is a contentious issue outside and inside the church, and values we cherish are invoked in this debate. I believe that we stand before a mystery which has not yielded its secrets, despite centuries of debate and probing. Here, I believe, our deepest emotions and spontaneous responses can be avenues for hearing God's voice.

As pacifist Christians, we may want to err on the side of preserving earliest pregnancy, even drawing the line at conception. But, in my opinion, we do not have to in order to be pro-life. Where early pregnancy is concerned, we must each draw our own line with humility in the face of mystery. And since the vast majority of abortions occur at about the stage of miscarriage I described, I believe that we harm the cause, not only of truthfulness, but also of concern for life when we term these actions murder. It is wrong to call the planned procedure "murder" when we know that the identical procedure, unplanned, was not death.

Those who have frittered away the word "holocaust" in this way have lost moral credibility when it may have served to make common ground where it is truly needed, uniting those who oppose late abortions, inadequate prenatal care and child abuse. The result has been a disaster. The pro-choice



camp becomes defensive when any limiting proposal is discussed and avert their gaze while late abortions, admittedly few in number, continue. No one effectively speaks out, for even principled pro-choicers feel they can't risk giving ground on a slope made slippery by "pro-lifers" who freight the ambiguities of earliest pregnancy with the rhetoric of murder.

Meanwhile, the pro-life ranks are full of women who owe their equilibrium, their marriages, their careers, their ability to live stable, planned lives to the intervention of birth control while dismissing as "mere convenience" the motives of women who used an intervention days or weeks later for the same reasons. This all or nothing debate has kept us from hearing each other.

My experience is one of thousands, I am sure. For other thousands, miscarriage was the loss of a child. Can we support each other and respect the insights we have gained? Is it too much to hope that we might cobble together a bridge between the two angry, self-righteous camps in this debate, perhaps a bridge constructed of life's ambiguous experiences, a respect for mysteries, and our own unrehearsed responses in all of their variety?

Ruth Stoltzfus Jost, a community activist and former poverty lawyer, attends Neil Avenue Mennonite Church in Columbus, Ohio.

**"When I say no to abortion
I say yes to life-giving
alternatives."**

by Leanna Rhodes

An activist: "My eyes were opened"

I grew up in a Christian family of nine children. I am married and the mother of seven. I have been a nurse for 24 years. When I was in nursing school, the Hippocratic Oath stated, "I will give no deadly drug to any, though it be asked of me, nor will I counsel such, and especially I will not aid a woman to procure an abortion." In recent years the abortion section has quietly been deleted and replaced with "I will do nothing that is illegal."

I was still in college when Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973. I still can't believe that our Christian, peace-loving community showed little concern about a decision that has claimed the lives of 30 million children. In 1989, I was invited to meet with Christians who were involved in witness and education against abortion. My eyes were opened about the abortion holocaust. I sensed the Holy Spirit prompting me to act on my conviction that abortion is an act of violence against the most vulnerable. I felt called to go to the front lines where abortions are performed, as an advocate for the voiceless.

On June 10, 1989, along with 200 others, I stood in front of an abortion clinic. For a reserved Mennonite woman, this was scary. I could not have done it without God's help. We joined in singing, Bible reading, prayer and testimonies as we blocked the clinic doors. I witnessed no violence by our group (although the media portrayed it otherwise). I saw love, compassion and a convincing witness for life. I saw young women coming to the abortuary. Some were crying, obviously not at peace about destroying their offspring. Some of our group were trained counselors who talked with them. A few chose life, praise the Lord!

After several hours, 55 of us were arrested and taken to jail. I felt uneasy standing before the judge, but God gave me a wonderful peace and a testimony to share. Following the trial, I was given opportunity to speak with the judge. He

"I find it odd that a church with a tradition of non-resistance and defenselessness is not speaking out about this war against the defenseless unborn, which claims 4,000 lives a day in the United States and many more worldwide."

affirmed my position and stated that as a Christian who would be attending a prayer breakfast the next morning, he would have to answer a lot of hard questions. He sentenced me to 100 hours of community service and fined me \$50, which I couldn't, in good conscience, pay. If I did not comply, I would go to jail for 30-60 days. The next morning I received a message—the judge had changed his mind. I could perform an additional 27 hours of service instead of paying the fine. I worked my hours at the local pregnancy center. It was an answer to prayer.

I have been involved in Operation Rescue several times since. Each time I have seen the Lord work in miraculous ways. On several occasions my husband and four oldest children joined me. They, too, were blessed through this experience. I was amazed at the opportunities to witness for our Lord Jesus.

When I say no to abortion I say yes to life-giving alternatives. I took a peer counseling course at the pregnancy center where I volunteer. I also work with educational efforts and the life chain street witness. I wear the "precious feet" pin and often give them away. I am a member of a pro-life nurses association which helps keep me abreast of professional issues.

As a nonviolent, peace-loving church, I would like us to see the violence involved in abortion. If we could visualize a two-ton pile of 4,400 recognizable babies from one day's work in America's abortion mills, would it make any difference? If we could see this as a violent act against mothers, would we be more willing to do something?

Leanna Rhodes lives in Dayton, Va.

by Vicki Markley-Sairs

An activist: "We have been silent too long"

The Bible speaks of the Lord "opening and closing the womb," a phrase that captures God's sovereignty and the insistence of life itself. But how do we open the womb today? With words like "empowerment" and "right to privacy," with seaweed and suction tubes and curettes, with forceps to crush little skulls and bags to catch tiny body parts.

I believe most Mennonites are pro-life. Many who are active in crisis pregnancy centers and chastity and pro-life educational work have written me in my capacity as editor of a pro-life newsletter for Mennonites called Meribah. Our purpose is to unite pro-life Mennonites in prayer and action to call the church to greater faithfulness in the matter of abortion. We try to do this without condemning those who have abortions, but by offering hope for healing and forgiveness. We try to show that to be pro-life is to be pro-woman and pro-peace.

Pro-life Mennonites have opened their homes and given their money, time and material possessions to help mothers choose life, practice chastity and receive Jesus' forgiveness and healing for past abortions. But often they have worked alone, sensing no support from the church at large. I find it odd that a church with a tradition of non-resistance and defenselessness is not speaking out about this war against the defenseless unborn, which claims 4,000 lives a day in the United States and many more worldwide.

It is a question of power. The pro-choice movement needs to establish a woman's primacy over her unborn child, even in the second and third trimester. Women's groups have fought pre-natal care programs on the grounds that they give the fetus too much legal status. This does not surprise me; I expect the world to be that way. What surprises me is that some Mennonites have bought into this and are willing to defend it, using the rhetoric of justice and empowerment.

Abortion is the violent taking of a life as a solution for a social problem. Abortion on demand means that children are a commodity to be treasured if you want them and disposed of if you don't. Our church offers the way of life and peace in every area but this. We don't tell a starving child, "Your

"Those lives that are most powerless, vulnerable and broken are the clearest vessels for God's powerful grace."

quality of life is so low, it's better if we don't feed you. You'll be happier if you just cease to be." We don't teach our children that their right to self-determination supersedes another's right to live. We teach the way of peace and self-sacrifice rather than the world's way of violence.

I believe we owe the pro-life community an apology and we owe God repentance. We have been silent too long. We have not acted in helpful ways. I love our theology, I believe we are right to practice non-resistance, but we are not unique. Many pro-lifers hold and practice similar beliefs. We are good at service, but thousands of pro-lifers have been serving in crisis pregnancy centers for years.

What we could contribute is an emphasis on loving our enemies. Much of current pro-life literature is characterized by harshness toward the opposition—abortion providers and abortion rights advocates. We could also add a voice in favor of conviction, not coercion. The abortion debate is strident at the national level. Gentle persuasion is needed, not name-calling.

We may discuss the difficulty of the decision; we may talk about the complexity of abortion; we may be against abortion but unable to identify as pro-life for fear of misinterpretation. But if we remain silent, we align ourselves with those who choose death over life, violence over peace and power over the powerless.

Vicki Markley-Sairs is a member of Mobile (Ala.) Mennonite Church.

by Margalea Warner

An activist: "Vessels for God's grace"

I was a high-risk pregnancy, born to a 40-year-old mother. Abortions were not legal at that time, but my mother could have obtained an illegal one if she chose. I am grateful for her courage. Although I had no obvious physical disability at birth, as a young adult I had the first onset of a genetically predisposed illness that has caused me to be hospitalized many times. I have made remarkable progress since taking a medication that costs almost \$5,000 a year. Some might see my life as demanding too much from the world—taking and giving nothing back. I have had those doubts myself at times, wondering if I wouldn't be better off if I had never been born.

It is a dangerous judgment to say that any life that is less than perfect, or any life that has potential for becoming a burden should be snuffed out. What a low value the world places on our lives! It's the mentality behind the discarded belongings, often in near-new condition, piled on the curb outside university dorms at the end of the school year.

Those lives that are most powerless, vulnerable and broken are the clearest vessels for God's powerful grace. As for me, the costly medical care some might question my right to has enabled me to live a creative, productive life. Yes, I am dependent in some ways, but so is every member of the church.

Yet how could I pass judgment on a Christian sister for choosing to end a pregnancy when I have never given birth, never borne the burden of raising a disabled child or the stigma of raising a healthy child as a single mother? I am called to love, not to judge. That's why I volunteer for the local chapter of Birthright, an international ministry that offers emotional, spiritual and practical support to women with crisis pregnancies.

Birthright aims to be non-judgmental, non-political and non-denominational. Volunteers are trained to listen sensitively, offering hope, not judgment. They do not threaten or use scare tactics and certainly do not show photographs of aborted fetuses. Instead of campaigning for changes in

"My life seemed full with two children and a mentally sick husband. I was not willing to walk into a job of parenting again alone."

legislation, Birthright volunteers pray for changes of the heart, one life at a time. This personal approach and non-political stance gave me the courage to volunteer. I could not with integrity act violently against women seeking abortion or the doctors who provide it. Violence and the taking of lives is a contradiction of the pro-life stance.

My full-time job makes it difficult to volunteer in the office, so I help put out the quarterly newsletter. In the last issue we highlighted 1 John 3:18: "Dear children, let us love not with word or tongue, but with action and in truth."

Trying to live out that verse, I take responsibility for nurturing children as a Sunday school and Bible school teacher. I try to be a faithful friend to children with disabilities and their families. This gives me the opportunity to witness to what I say I believe—that every human life is unique, precious and valuable.

Margalea Warner is a member of First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, Iowa.



Women tell their stories:

"It was the right decision for me and my family"

In 1974 I was pregnant with an unwanted child. We had an eight-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy and had discontinued birth control pills because of health reasons. I had an IUD; it was not 100 percent safe and I was devastated when I learned I was pregnant.

Our life was in turmoil with this major decision that would affect the rest of my life and I didn't have a lot of support from my church or family. My husband would not consider a vasectomy and I took time off from my career to be a full time mom and had plans to return to work in a few years. My husband became depressed and couldn't communicate and I felt totally alone and responsible for making this decision.

I felt I would be judged if I shared in my church community. I sought out agencies that were pro-choice and pro-life. Anti-abortion material seemed so oppressive of women and didn't look beyond the birth. We were foster parents so I experienced firsthand the outcome of unwanted, unloved children and the early detrimental effects this can have. I believe every spirit needs that acceptance in the womb, a sense of a wanted place in the world and a long term commitment and financial obligation from a caregiver.

I searched scripture for my answer. I spent time in silence. I cried lots and I had no pastoral care available at that time. I believe my doctor was the guardian angel I needed as I suggested the possibility of a therapeutic abortion. He helped me co-ordinate the appointments. At that time you needed to see two gynecologists before consent was given. I felt humiliated and on trial. One was empathetic and the other reminded me I could change my mind up to the last minute.

In two short weeks I had to make my decision to be safely within the first trimester. I wavered. I considered carrying it full term with adoption. I wanted someone to make the decision for me so the pain of indecision would go away.

My life seemed full with two children and a mentally sick husband. I was not willing to walk into a job of parenting again alone. After much struggle, reflection time, scripture searching, reading books on both sides of the issue, I chose to have a therapeutic abortion and it was the right decision for me and my family.

Twenty years later in a safe healing circle of women I can share this story. My body still feels tight or uncomfortable in Christian circles when women are being condemned for abortions. I believe a woman should have free choice and it's a personal decision between her and her doctor.

I financially support a Canadian pro-choice organization. It's a step forward for women's lives in the 90's. •

The writer of this story, and writers of the following three stories, wish to remain anonymous.

Women tell their stories:

"I don't regret the choice I made"

Being raised a Mennonite and considering myself a pacifist, I was anti-abortion until I participated in a sexuality seminar in college in the mid-70's. Then I began to think abortion would be acceptable in the case of incest or rape. As I became more of a feminist, I began feeling abortion wasn't so bad. Several years later, during an issues Sunday school class discussion, I began to feel that abortion, at least for me, could never be an option.

My husband and I had two children who were planned and after a number of years decided to have one more. I got pregnant and even though I was over 35, I chose not to have amniocentesis or even a simple blood test. I didn't feel I could ethically abort a child just because it might be handicapped. Because my first two had been delivered by Caesarean, I was scheduled for an ultrasound at about four months to determine my due date.

Instead of finding out the sex of my child, as I had hoped, I was told by my gynecologist that no head could be seen on my child. At first I thought he was joking. He explained my child's brain was not developing, and there was no chance for survival. I was scheduled for a comprehensive ultrasound in a larger hospital to confirm the diagnosis. My doctor encouraged me to consider terminating the pregnancy if my child did have anencephaly, a neural tube defect. He informed me that most anencephalic babies don't survive childbirth; the 30 percent that do, soon die. I was in shock. I had told everyone about my pregnancy. I was working at a job with a conservative staff. I acknowledge that I never felt real attached to my unborn children, so while I was

devastated by the upcoming loss, my sorrow was more for myself than for my child.

The second ultrasound confirmed the first. With something like relief we found out that the anencephaly was so severe there was no chance of life after birth. In a few cases, a child with anencephaly can live, with severe handicaps. The staff at the larger hospital encouraged us to schedule an abortion, which we did with some hesitation. We had only a few days to process the whole thing.

The following Sunday, after informing the pastor and a few others of our situation, we read a simple statement in church, informing our congregation and saying we were open to questions and concerns. If it hadn't been happening so fast, if my husband had been open to counsel, I would have felt better about asking a small group from our church to help us make the decision. Only one caring but conservative friend challenged us. My small group was supportive throughout.

The abortion itself went smoothly at the city hospital, and I returned to work a few days later. My boss was sympathetic, but others said nothing. I found out later that one employee quit his job in part because our Christian place of business didn't try to prevent me from having the abortion. I felt labelled.

I couldn't imagine carrying the child to term, enduring the continued discomfort, pity and awkward explanations. I worried some that the child might feel more pain in an abortion than in birth. I found myself thinking it was best to return the child to God's loving arms right away. I knew I was rationalizing.

I wish I had been encouraged to have the simple blood test, for we would have known earlier. Better yet, if I had taken a folic acid supplement throughout my childbearing years, it might not have happened. I took folic acid before becoming pregnant again and now have a third healthy child.

My Mennonite insurance company covered the costs of the abortion, partly because of a supportive letter written by my Mennonite gynecologist. Elective terminations of pregnancy are not normally covered, but they decided my case was unique. They informed us that they would refuse to make such exceptions in the future, except when the life of the mother was at risk.

I wish I had had more information. I wish I had done some things differently. But six years later I don't regret the choice I made. •

"But when people at church talk about abortion and how wrong it is, I have never had the courage to admit that I had an abortion. I have been afraid they would judge me."

Women tell their stories:

"I was afraid they would judge me"

Fourteen years ago, before I was a Christian, I was involved in a relationship and taking precautions against getting pregnant. Even so, I found myself pregnant. I was shattered. My boyfriend went back with a former girlfriend who was also a friend of mine. I was getting ready to return to school and could not see how I could raise a child. I also did not feel that I could stand the judgment people would make about me. I had visions of pointing fingers and being treated like a pariah.

I had always been a proponent of women having reproductive choices. Then I became a Christian and joined the Mennonite faith, whose stance was the sanctity of life at all times in all situations—war, capital punishment, abortion.

When I read about technology to allow women who can't have children to have them and then read the number of abortions performed each year, a logical solution seems to be to let the women who can't have babies adopt the babies of the women who want to have abortions. It seems crazy to have potential babies destroyed at the same time many women are willing to do anything to have babies.

If I had not had an abortion, what would life be like? How would I feel if I had given it up for adoption? If I had kept it, I would have a 14-year-old child. Now I am in my late 30's and unmarried. Was that my only chance to have a child? Is God punishing me?

Even though I understand that abortion takes a potential life, I don't feel that I have the right to make someone else's decision. If it happened to me now, I would not have an abortion. A strong influence on my decision is my church. I have seen how they respond to people and I am confident that I would still be loved and supported even though I committed this "horrendous sin" of premarital sex.

But when people at church talk about abortion and how wrong it is, I have never had the courage to admit that I had an abortion. I have been afraid they would judge me. Would they still love me?•

Women tell their stories:

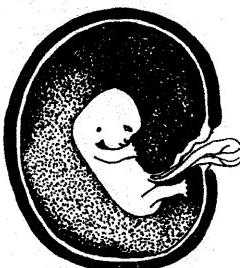
"A child should be planned"

"The queasiness is from being pregnant," I explained to my husband, who was just home from work. We hugged, but not jubilantly. Raising a child brought no excitement. Being parents was a future possibility. I was in grad school, but that was not the main drawback. Rather, we believed that a child should be planned, that parenting was so major a venture that it required commitment and a higher level of spiritual and emotional growth than we then had.

This gut conviction came from my childhood in a poor, working-class community where youngsters often received blows and reprimands that planted worthlessness deep into their psyches. Watching such abuse convinced me not to have a child until I longed to be a parent. I was waiting for what I would call today "an inner leading."

We had not been thoughtless about contraception. I had taken the pill for several years and only recently had an IUD inserted. I was looking for a choice that was less chemical. But the IUD, a Dalkon shield, had not shielded. I was pregnant and felt sad and betrayed. This was several years before Roe v. Wade, but abortions were legal in a nearby jurisdiction. We both felt it was most life-giving to postpone parenthood that we had not chosen. In that era, the issue did not have strong, battling camps of pro-life and pro-choice advocates.

I had been active in the Mennonite Church since birth, and I did not recall teaching on a topic that was so distant from both potluck and prayer meeting discussions. I had a sense that my Mennonite father, a pastor all of my life, would not have approved of our decision. To be true to my own inner peace, I needed parenting to be a choice that I could



"The church in India should be speaking against the abortion of females that is carried out here and is internationally condemned as unethical. Women must realize that the children they are carrying have as much right to life as themselves."

—Mrs. S. Masig, nursing superintendent of Nav Jivan Hospital, a Mennonite hospital in rural Bihar, India.

celebrate throughout the decades of being a mother. I did not want it to be an experience tainted by resentments or regrets.

We did not tell our parents or the people at our new church home. It did not feel safe. I did tell my Mennonite therapist, who was also in seminary. He was surprised that I felt so clear about having an abortion, that I was not in agony about my choice. Together we reviewed my inner promptings and what it meant to honor them. Our exchange was affirming.

At the abortion clinic, a social worker thoroughly questioned my husband and me. Were we aware that many people feel guilt afterwards? Did we have questions or second thoughts that we wanted to discuss? There was plenty of time to change our minds. But I went ahead. The procedure was brief and virtually painless, but I was shocked to see a towel with some blood on it. After an hour of rest and another chat with the social worker, we returned home on the interstate. We used more reliable contraception.

A few years later we began planning eagerly for parenting. Today is my oldest child's twentieth birthday, an occasion to pull out memories and hold them with gratitude. Over the years of parenting two daughters, I have known more joy than I knew existed when I was in my twenties. The responsibility of caring for them and entrusting them to their own inner guide, the Holy Spirit, is a journey that I cherish. Wanting them was a powerful component in my spiritual growth as a mother. I celebrate the sanctity of their lives. •



by Mrs. K. Martin

A church leader from India: "Times have changed"

In our country abortion is legally accepted and easily available. Twenty years ago Mennonite women never thought of abortion, but now sometimes abortion is done within our Mennonite community. I am 58 years old, and in our days we never thought of abortion. We considered child-bearing a natural part of life. This was and still is the faith amongst our generation. But the times have changed and the outlook of the present generation has changed.

We have had many debates about the peace position, but we have never had open discussion on abortion. The peace seminars of our Mennonite Church in India have not dealt with the subject. I was in a council meeting of Christian Medical College, Vellore, where the question of abortion by Christians was discussed. The conclusion was no for abortion unless medically needed.

The Mennonite teaching is clear: we believe in peace and non-violence in all aspects of life. But the understanding of each individual differs. The number of women having abortions has been low, so it has not been discussed as a social issue. Whenever advice is sought, the church leaders have always advised the woman to carry on the pregnancy and enjoy a fruitful life.

A Mennonite lady doctor reflects, "I have met Mennonite women wanting abortions. I advise them to continue the pregnancy and then get a tubal ligation or use any family planning method." Reasons she observes for abortions: the husband is not willing to see the problems of the wife as she becomes pregnant; the husband wants the abortion and sends his wife; the woman is afraid to use contraceptives; she can't see raising a child while having a job; she has diabetes or hypertension; she has two children and can't bear the stress of another.

The status of women in India is still in a lukewarm state. Many times her pregnancy is unwanted by both partners; or the man does not care what happens to his woman; or the woman has a job or weak physique to carry on her pregnancy.

The church can be one safe place where women and children can find refuge and strength. Instead of pushing the distressed woman away from the fellowship, we should give her moral and monetary help or whatever she needs. We often feel sorry for a woman in such a condition but do nothing.

The elders of the church have a responsibility to give their time and minds to the needs of people in the community. Abortion should be dealt with by the women's group; youngsters might get caught in it and need counselling. We have a role to play. With God's guidance we will be able to help.

Mrs. K. Martin is a medical practitioner at Dhamtari Christian Hospital, in Madhya Pradesh, India.

by Mrs. Helen Stephen

A church leader from India: “The church became a safe place”

Years ago when I taught in a Christian girls' school, I met Haramani, a single teacher with a five-year-old son. He was a sweet, friendly little boy. She told me she tried to have an abortion, but Rev. and Mrs. P. W. Penner, a missionary couple, spent much time convincing her it would be sinful to abort the child.

She was sent far away for delivery. She was so ashamed that she wanted to leave the child and run away, but one day, when the boy was sleeping, she looked at him and loved him. She prayed to God to give her courage to accept him. She named him Vijay, which means victory.

When she came back to the school, she faced discipline but after some time she was taken back. The church, the missionaries and the teachers showed love and sympathy. Later she was elected secretary of the annual church conference. Now retired from teaching, Haramani lives with Vijay and his family. She has a grandson. I visited her in the last week of February this year. God's people, the church, became a safe place for her and her child.

Mrs. Helen Stephen is an experienced leader among Mennonite women. She is from the General Conference Mennonite Church in Jagdeeshpur.

Resources suggested by contributors to this issue

Books

David L. Bender, editor, *Abortion: Opposing Viewpoints*. Greenhaven Press, 1991.

Duane Friesen, *Moral Issues in the Control of Birth*. Faith & Life Press, Newton, Kansas, 1974.

Kate Maloy and Maggie Jones Patterson, *Birth or Abortion: Private Struggles in a Political World*. Plenum Press, 1992.

Articles

Diane Gianelli "Abortion Providers Share Inner Conflicts," *American Medical News*, July 12, 1993.

Monica Migliorino Miller, "Severed Ties: How Abortion Dissolves Feminine Authority," *Crisis*, November 1991.

Periodicals

Meribah, a Mennonite Newsletter about Abortion, 1258 Charmaine Circle, Mobile, Alabama 36605.

Sisterlife, published by Feminists for Life of America, 733 15th St. N.W., Suite 100, Washington, D.C., 20005.

Talking about abortion among those who disagree

Abortion is something we can talk about in the church. Mennonite Conciliation Service, an MCC U.S. program, has developed the following simple exercise to help people find common ground on this and other difficult issues. This past summer I was part of a group that worked through the following exercise. We were very surprised at how many interests those on each side identified in common.

—The Editor

To start: Number off to form groups of 6-8 people. Divide each group in half. Randomly assign one half of each group to be “pro-choice” and one half to be “pro-life.” Follow the steps below, allowing 4-5 minutes for each step.

Goals:

- dialogue
- search for commonalities of interests
- search for ways to work together

STEP 1 In your half-group, discuss:

—What are our beliefs around abortion? What do we want to see happen and why? List/articulate your position(s).

STEP 2 Each subgroup shares its positions/beliefs with the other subgroup. The listening group paraphrases/summarizes briefly what they heard.

STEP 3 In full group, discuss:

—What are our interests? (What concerns/needs/hopes lie behind each of our positions?)
—What are the interests we have in common? List these.

STEP 4 Discuss:

Given the common interests (if any) listed, are there things we could work on together? Brainstorm and list some options. Try to be creative.

STEP 5 Discuss, still in role:

As we discuss our concerns and differences around abortion, what do we believe is important about the dialogue? How do we want to be treated? What do we want the “other side” to know/believe about us?

After small group discussions, allow time for people from each small group to report on what happened during the discussion time, and to share their learnings and feelings.

Book review:

A compassionate look at a difficult topic

Family Violence: The Compassionate Church Responds
by Melissa A. Miller (Herald Press: Waterloo, ON and Scottdale, PA, 1994, 180 pp.)

Melissa Miller has written a highly readable and usable book. The format is suitable for small group or Sunday School study (13 chapters, each ending with a brief prayer and discussion questions), and will aid the individual or group willing to tackle the hard questions of family violence.

Each chapter opens with a story. These open-ended vignettes are poignant introductions to the theme of the chapter. After a brief introduction, Miller deepens the theme using a biblical story and then reflects on that story in light of the theme. The next section, “Making the Bible story our story” helps the reader to see parallels to our present situations. A look at further implications, the study questions and a brief resource list complete each chapter.

Miller takes it as a given that violence is a part of the lives of church people and moves directly to discussing how the church can respond. You won't find many statistics or studies proving the existence or prevalence of family violence. Miller also makes clear that both men and women abuse and that people of all ages can become victims.

A central theme is that of power—its use and abuse within relationships. Miller argues that when power is misused, when one person dominates another, then violence, whether sexual, emotional or physical, can result. But when power is used in healthy ways, when people work at creating relationships and structures where all parties can speak and act freely, then both biological and church families can thrive.

I was especially impressed by the direct but compassionate manner by which Melissa Miller tackles some very difficult questions. Without becoming judgmental, she examines how the church can work with those who offend and can also learn from the offender. The list of practical ways to help families in crisis due to abuse will help many people who simply didn't know what to do. She also faces the thorny issue of forgiveness and reconciliation, making a distinction between the two, and allows that sometimes the latter will simply not be possible—that a covenant of trust so seriously broken cannot always be restored.

The chapter "What to do when there's nothing to do" is a brief but helpful discussion on how caregivers can remain healthy as they work in difficult and stressful situations. The chapter "The church as counterculture" is one that may make many groups squirm as they consider and analyze their own congregations in light of power balance and imbalances.

Family Violence will provoke and comfort, challenge and guide.

—Reviewed by Bev Suderman-Gladwell, Port Rowan, Ont.

Letters

Many months ago *Report* was kind enough to publish my urgent request for penpals. And I am grateful that you cared enough to do so. However, of the few responses I got, most were from Canadians, and as wonderful as those ladies have been, I [as a woman in a correctional facility] can't always afford the postage to correspond with them as often as I'd like. Please again publish my name and address and request American Mennonite penpals. Thanks for listening.

—Lois Landis, Unit 5C, PO Box 2779, Appleton, WI 54911.

Please re-read your *Women's Concerns Report* statement on the last page of each issue. I may be a closet male too afraid to admit how much *Report* means to me. Well, here I am out of the closet, and I'm saying *Report* is wonderful.

—Jake Buhler, Nonthaburi, Thailand

Women in mission

Grace and Paul Brunner are interim pastors at Trinity Mennonite Church, Hillsboro, Kan.

Sandy and Doug Epp are church planters for the Conference of Mennonites in B.C. in the Sardis-Promontory area.

Ingrid Loepf Thiessen was ordained in June at Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden, Ont.

Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau is associate pastor of Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

Call for stories: Anabaptist women as “Quiet in the Land”?

The following questions were formulated by Carol Penner and Carol Ann Weaver for a multi-media dramatic piece for the June 8-11, 1995, “Quiet in the Land: Women of Anabaptist Traditions in Historical Perspective” conference to be at Millersville (Pa.) University. The questions are meant to elicit conversation and stories from women of Mennonite background. The multi-media piece will include poetry by Julia Kasdorf and Di Brandt, your stories, music by Carol Ann Weaver, and possibly dance. If requested, the written version of your stories will be sent to you for editing and verification. Each contributor may choose to be credited or remain anonymous, thus assuring complete confidentiality.

Questions:

- 1) What is *your story*? Does “quiet in the land” describe you or other Mennonite-background women you know/have known?
- 2) How would you respond to “in the land”? Have women been close to the earth? Have they been gardeners or care-takers of the land?
- 3) Has women’s *silence* meant “being silenced” and a sign of weakness, or “positive choice” and a sign of strength?
- 4) Is “quiet” a passive or active word?
- 5) How would you respond to “quiet” or “silence” in terms of:
 - a) body language
 - b) dress and makeup
 - c) physical work (domestic, out-of-doors, professional, etc.)
 - d) child-bearing and child care (birth stories, “raising” children)
 - e) money
 - f) speech
 - g) education, job access, opportunity
 - h) church (speaking, leadership and/or opportunity)
 - i) decision-making within family or institution
 - j) women’s cycles and rites of passage
 - k) incest and physical abuse
- 6) How have women gotten along with each other—sister with sister, mother with daughter, or grandmother with

granddaughter? Has there been a silencing of women by women, or a silence about difficult or “dysfunctional” relations among the women in a family?

- 7) What about customs such as the oldest one or two daughters staying home to care for parents, while siblings are allowed to marry (cited by a Russian Mennonite in Manitoba)? [denoting silence of choice!?] Or whole families of unmarried sisters who live together (Pennsylvania Mennonites of late 19th, early 20th C.)? [denoting??]. Or how about the high incidence of single, celibate Mennonite women?
- 8) What about lesbian and bisexual experiences? Is there silencing here?
- 9) How about women’s alternative forms of spirituality and feminine images of God? Are “women’s experiences” granted credence within the church?
- 10) Other?

As you write your story—essay, free verse, broken sentence style—keep in mind that your writing should be direct and conversational, as though talking to a close friend. These questions merely provide possible topic areas. We are looking for stories, not answers. We cannot guarantee inclusion of all material, but we would like to use as much of your writing as possible with as little editing as need be.

Length and deadline: Each story could range from a short, one-paragraph vignette to a two-to-three-page saga. All submissions should be received by January 1, 1995. Bear in mind, your stories are sacred text! We want to know and learn from them. Thank you for your responses!

Send to either Carol Ann Weaver or Carol Penner:

Carol Ann Weaver
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University of Waterloo
Waterloo ON N2L 3G6
Canada
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email: caeweaver@watserv1.uwaterloo.ca

Carol Penner
Box 861
Vineland ON L0R 2C0
Canada
home phone: (905) 562-3094
fax: (905) 562-7111

Marcia Rempel is minister of youth and young adults at First Mennonite Church, Newton, Kan.

Dorothy Nickel Friesen will begin as pastor of First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio, in June 1995. She is assistant dean at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.

Eileen Wiebe is pastor at Superb (Sask.) Mennonite Church.

Laura Loewen has ordained in June. She is pastor of Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal.

Sharon S. Foster was ordained at Park View Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., to serve as a hospital chaplain in Tennessee.

News and verbs

- The next **Women in Ministry** conference will be May 26-28, 1995, at Colombia Bible College in Clearbrook, B.C. The theme will be "Unity and Uniqueness in Christ," and will include a celebration of global sisterhood. All Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women are welcome. For information, contact Miriam Ruiz, Women's Concerns staff person at MCC B.C., Box 2038, Clearbrook BC V2T 3T8; telephone 604-850-6639; fax 604-850-8734.
- "Braiding Hearts and Hands" is a **new anthology of poems and dramatic readings by women**. Published by MCC Canada, it contains 42 submissions by 26 contributors reflecting on how women view and experience the church and on subjects such as abuse, conflict, hunger, poverty and the traditional role of women. Cost of the anthology is \$9 Cdn./\$7.50 U.S. Order from MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Dr., Winnipeg, Man. R3T 5K9.
- "Silent Labourers" is a 96-page book by Doris Dube of Zimbabwe, published by Matopo Book Centre in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. It is a collection of stories about **Zimbabwean and Zambian Brethren in Christ women**. Cost is \$2 U.S./\$3 Cdn. Order from Karen Zehr, MCC, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.
- Women's Missionary and Service Commission (WMSC) is sponsoring **two translation projects** for its 1994-95 annual project. It is sponsoring a French translation of *How Christians Made Peace With War* by John Driver, for use in French Africa, and a Spanish translation of *Strength for the Journey*, a study of I John by Marty Kolb-Wyckoff, for use in Hispanic Mennonite churches.
- Beryl Brubaker was named vice president for **enrollment management** at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va. She has been chair of the nursing department.
- Mary Ellen Newport has been named **assistant dean** for academic affairs at Bluffton (Ohio) College.
- Roma J. Quapp of Ottawa is new **editor/journalist** for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. In that capacity she will edit *CMC News*.

- Lara Hall is new **youth and adult editor** at Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, Pa. She is responsible for youth curriculum projects as well as assisting in adult Bible studies.
- Ilene Bergen of London, Ont., has been appointed full-time **Christian Education staff person** for Mennonite Conference of Ontario.
- Mary Anne Hildebrand of Winkler, Man., was elected vice president of the **Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada**.
- Marian Kleinsasser Towne has written, *Bread of Life: Diaries and Memories of a Dakota Family, 1936-1945*. The book is based on diaries of her father, the late J.P. Kleinsasser. Stories take place in the tightly-knit **Hutterite Mennonite community of Freeman, S.D.** Cost is \$25. For information write: Marian K. Toews, 5129 N. Illinois St., Indianapolis, IN 46208-2613.
- "**Creation Summit: Shaping an Anabaptist Theology for Living**" will be February 24-26, 1995, at Wonderland Conference Center in Camp Lake, Wis. It is sponsored by the Mennonite Environmental Task Force. All interested persons welcome. Contact Lenore Waltner, MBCM, Box 1245, Elkhart, IN 46515-1245.

Mennonite Central Committee invites applications for the position of:

Executive Secretary

Starting date: January 1996
Location: Akron, Pennsylvania
Applications will be accepted through November 30, 1994.

Direct inquiries and applications to:
Paul Quiring, Chair, Search Committee
6548 North Thorne Street, Fresno, CA 93711
Work phone: (209) 432-2800
Home phone: (209) 431-8290



Mennonite Central Committee and MCC U.S.
21 South 12th Street, PO Box 500, Akron, PA
17501-0500
(717) 859-1151 (717) 859-3889

Mennonite Central Committee Canada
134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9
(204) 261-6381

Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

- 1995 is the 75th **anniversary of women's suffrage** in the United States. For information on resources on planning a suffrage anniversary celebration, write to National Women's History Project, 7738 Bell Road, Windsor, CA 95492.
- "At Home Dad" is a newsletter for **stay-at-home fathers**. If interested in a free sample copy, send a self-addressed stamped envelop to At-Home Dad, Peter Baylies, 61 Brightwood Ave., N. Andover, MA 01845-1702.
- "One half is male and the other half female. The load of life is on the shoulders of both," goes the title song of a **new audio-cassette, "Responsibility of Life."** The tape, **produced by a Nepali women's group**, features 10 original songs that focus on discrimination against women

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

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and general conditions of women in Nepal. The songs are in Nepali, and the tape is accompanied by a booklet with words in Nepali and English. The cassette was produced by the United Mission to Nepal Advisory Group on Nepali Women. It can be ordered from MCC Central/South Asia Desk, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501, for \$7 U.S./\$9.50 Cdn.

- Rebecca C. Horst has been named **interim associate dean of Goshen (Ind.) College**, while the associate dean, John Nyce, serves as interim dean through the 1994-1995 school year.
- "To be a woman: **African women's response to the economic crisis**" is a 42-minute video produced by Visafric Productions in 1992. It offers a critical analysis of the impact of economic Structural Adjustment Programs on the lives of women and children in Ghana, Uganda and Zambia. The video provides help in understanding the struggles and coping mechanisms of African women. Study guide included. Available from MCC Akron, MCC Manitoba, and MCC Ontario.

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